

Pour ce qu'il fault que maine tout affin ;
 Je nay parent, amy, frère ou affin
 Que ne face tout rédiger en pouldre,
 Et suis de Dieu ad ce commise affin,
 Que l'on me doubte autant que tonnant fouldre.

Some of the editions are ornamented with cuts, in which Death is occasionally introduced, and that portion of the work which exclusively relates to him seems to have been separately published, M. Goujet¹ having mentioned that he had seen a copy in vellum, containing twelve leaves, with an engraving to every one of the stanzas, twenty-three in number. More is unnecessary to be added, as M. Peignot has elaborately and very completely handled the subject in his interesting "*Recherches sur les Danses des Morts.*" Dijon, 1826. 8vo.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Errors of various writers who have introduced the subject of the Dance of Death.



O enumerate even a moiety of these mistakes would almost occupy a separate volume, but it may be as well to notice some of them which are to be found in works of common occurrence.

TRAVELLERS.—The erroneous remarks of Bishop Burnet and Mr. Coxe have been already adverted to. See pp. 70,

118, and 123.

Misson seems to regard the old Danse Macabre as the work of Holbein.

The Rev. Robert Gray, in "*Letters during the course of a Tour through Germany and Switzerland in the years 1791 and 1792,*" has stated that Mechel has engraved *Rubens's designs* from the Dance of Death, now perishing on the walls of the churchyard of the Predicant convent, where it was sketched in 1431.

¹ Biblioth. Franç. tom. x. p. 436.

Mr. Wood, in his "View of the History of Switzerland," as quoted in the Monthly Review, Nov. 1799, p. 290, states, that "the Dance of Death in the churchyard of the Predicants has been falsely ascribed to Holbein, as it is proved that it was painted *long after the death of that artist, and not before he was born*, as the honourable Horace Walpole supposes." Here the corrector stands in need himself of correction, unless it be possible that he is not fairly quoted by the reviewer.

Miss Williams, in her Swiss Tour, 1798, when speaking of the Basle Dance of Death, says it was painted by Kleber, a *pupil of Holbein*.

Those intelligent and amusing travellers, Breval, Keysler, and Blainville, have carefully avoided the above strange mistakes.

WRITERS ON PAINTING AND ENGRAVING.—MeysSENS, in his article for Holbein in "the effigies of the Painters," mentions his "Death's Dance, in the town-hall of Basle, the design whereof he first neatly cut in wood and afterwards painted, which appeared so fine to the learned Erasmus," &c. English edition, 1694, p. 15.

Felibien, in his "Entretiens sur les Vies des Peintres," follows MeysSENS as to the painting in the town-hall.

Le Comte places the supposed painting by Holbein in the fish-market, and in other respects copies MeysSENS. "Cabinet des Singularités," &c. tom. iii. p. 323, edit. 1702, 12mo.

Bullart not only places the painting in the town-hall of Basle, but adds, that he afterwards engraved it in wood. "Acad. des Sciences et des Arts," tom. ii. p. 412.

Mr. Evelyn, in his "Sculptura," the only one of his works that does him no credit, and which is a meagre and extremely inaccurate compilation, when speaking of Holbein, actually runs riot in error and misconception. He calls him a Dane. He makes what he terms "the licentiousness of the friars and nuns," meaning probably Hollar's sixteen etchings after Holbein's satire on monks and friars and other members of the Romish Church as **the** persecutors of Christ, and also the "Dance Machabre and Mortis imago," to have been cut in wood, and one or both of the latter to have been painted in the church at Basle. Mr. Evelyn's own copy of

this work, with several additions in manuscript, is in the possession of Mr. Taylor, a retired and ingenious artist, of Cirencester-place. He probably intended to reprint it, and opposite the above-mentioned word "Dane" has inserted a query.

Sandart places the Dance of Death in the fish-market at Basle, and makes Holbein the painter as well as the engraver. "Acad. artis pictoriæ," p. 238, edit. 1683, folio.

Baldinucci speaks of twenty prints of the Dance of Death painted by Holbein in the Senate-house of Basle. "Notizie dè professori del disegno," &c. tom. iii. pp. 313 and 319.

M. Descamps inadvertently ascribes the old Dance of Death on the walls of the churchyard of Saint Peter to the pencil of Holbein. "Vie des Peintres Flamands," &c. 1753. 8vo. Tom. i. p. 75.

Papillon, in his account of the Dance of Death, abounds with inaccuracies. He says, that a magistrate of Basle employed him to paint a Dance of Death in the fish-market, near a churchyard: that the work greatly increased his reputation, and made much noise in the world, although it has many anatomical defects; that he engraved this painting on small blocks of wood with unparalleled beauty and delicacy. He supposes that they first appeared in 1530 at Basle or Zurich, and, as he thinks, with a title and German verses on each print. Now he had never seen any edition so early as 1530, nor any of the cuts with German verses, and having probably been misled on this occasion, he has been the cause of misleading many subsequent writers, as Fournier, Huber, Strutt, &c. He adopts the error as to the mark **H** on the thirty-sixth subject belonging to Holbein. He is entirely ignorant of the nature and character of the fool or idiot in No. xliii. whom he terms "un homme lascif qui a levé le devant de sa robe:" and, to crown the whole, he makes the old Macaber Dance an imitation of that ascribed to Holbein.

De Murr, in tom. ii. p. 535 of his "Bibliothèque de Peinture," &c. servilely copies Papillon in all that he has said on the subject, with some additional errors of his own.

The Abbé Fontenai, in the article for Holbein in his

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* *Dictionnaire des Artistes*," Paris, 1776, 8vo. not only makes him the painter of the old Macaber Dance, but places it in the town-house at Basle.

Mr. Walpole, or rather Vertue, in the "Anecdotes of Painting in England," corrects the error of those who give the old Macaber Dance to Holbein, but inadvertently makes that which is usually ascribed to him to have been borrowed from the other.

Messrs. Huber and Rost make Holbein the engraver of the Lyons wood-cuts, and suppose the original drawings to be preserved in the public library at Basle. They probably allude to the problematical drawings that were used by M. de Mechel, and which are now in Russia. "Manuel des curieux et des amateurs de l'art." Tom. i. p. 155.

In the "Notices sur les Graveurs," Besançon, 1807, 8vo. a work that has, by some writers, been given to M. Malpé, and by others to the Abbé Baverel, Papillon is followed with respect to the supposed edition of 1530, and its German verses.

Mr. Janssen is more inaccurate than any of his predecessors, some of whom have occasionally misled him. He makes Albert Dürer the inventor of the designs, the greater part of which, he says, are from the Dance of Death at Berne. He adopts the edition of 1530, and the German verses. He condemns the title-page of the edition of 1562 for stating an addition of seventeen plates, whereas, says he, there are but five; but the editor meant only that there were seventeen more cuts than in the original, which had only forty-one.

MISCELLANEOUS WRITERS.—Charles Patin, a libeller of the English nation, has made Holbein the engraver on wood of a Dance of Death, which, he says, is "not much unlike that in the churchyard of the Predicants at Basle, painted, as some say, from the life, by Holbein." He ought to have known that this work was executed near a century before Holbein was born. "Erasmi stultitiæ laus." Basileæ, 1676, 8vo. at the end of the list of Holbein's works.

Martinière, in his "Geographical Dictionary," makes Holbein the inventor of the Macaber Dance at Basle.

Goujet, in his very useful "Bibliothèque Française," tom.

x. p. 436, has erroneously stated that the Lyons engravings on wood were by the celebrated artist Salomon Bernard, usually called "Le petit Bernard." The mistake is very pardonable, as it appears that Bernard chiefly worked in the above city.

M. Compan, in his "Dictionnaire de Danse," 1787, 12mo. under the article *Macabrée*, very gravely asserts that the author took his work from the Maccabees, "qui, comme tout le monde scait, dansèrent, et en ont fait époque pour les morts." He then quotes some lines from a modern edition of the *Danse Macabre*, where the word *Machabées* is ignorantly substituted for "Machabre."

M. Fournier states that Holbein painted a Dance of Death in the fish-market at Basle, reduced it, and engraved it. "Dissertation sur l'imprimerie," p. 70.

Mr. Warton has converted the imaginary Machabree into a *French poet*, but corrects himself in his "History of English Poetry." He supposes the single cut in Lydgate to represent *all* the figures that were in St. Paul's cloister. He atones for these errors in referring to Holbein's cuts in Cranmer's Catechism, as entirely different in style from those published at Lyons, *but which he thinks are probably the work of Albert Dürer*, and also in his conjecture that the painter Reperdius might have been concerned in the latter. See "Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser," vol. ii. p. 116, &c. In his most elegant and instructive "History of English Poetry" he relapses into error when he states that Holbein painted a Dance of Death in the Augustine monastery at Basle in 1543, and that Georgius Æmylius published this Dance at Lyons, 1542, one year before Holbein's painting at Basle appeared. "History of English Poetry," vol. ii. p. 364, edit. Price.

The Marquis de Paulmy ascribes the old Macaber Dance at Basle to Holbein, and adds, "le sujet et l'exécution en sont aussi singuliers que ridicules." "Mélanges tirés d'une grande bibliothèque," tom. Ff. 371.

M. Champollion Figeac in Millin's "Magasin encyclopédique," 1811, tom. vi. has an article on an edition of the "Danse Macabre antérieure à celle de 1486." In this article he states that Holbein painted a fresco Dance of Death at Basle near the end of the 15th century (Holbein

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was not born till 1498 !); that this Dance resembled the Danse Macabre, all the characters of which are in Holbein's style; that it is still more like the Dance in the "Monasticon Anglicanum" in a single print; and that the English Dance belongs to John Porey, an author who appears, however, to be unknown to all biographers. We should have been obliged to M. Figeac if he had mentioned where he met with this John Porey, whom he again mentions, but in such a manner as to leave a doubt whether he means to consider him as a poet or a painter. Even M. Millin himself, from whom more accuracy might have been expected, speaks of Holbein's work as at the Dominican convent at Basle.

The "Nouveau Dictionnaire Historique," 1789, 8vo. gives the painting on the walls of the cemetery of St. Peter at Basle, to Holbein, confounding the two works as some other French biographical dictionaries have done, especially one that has cited an edition of the Danse Macabre in 1486 as the first of Holbein's painting, though it immediately afterwards states that artist to have been born in 1498.

In that excellent work, the "Biographie Universelle," in 42 vols. 8vo. 1811—1828, M. Ponce, under the article "Holbein," inaccurately refers to "the Dance of Death painted in 1543 on the walls of a cemetery at Basle," at the same time properly remarking that it was not Holbein's. He refers to the supposed original drawings of Holbein's work at Petersburg that were engraved by De Mechel, and concludes his brief note with a reference to a dissertation of M. Raymond in Millin's "Magasin encyclopédique," 1814, tom. v. which is nothing more than a simple notice of two editions of the Danse Macabre, described in the present dissertation.

There is likewise in the "Biographie Universelle" an article entitled "Macaber, poète Allemand," by M. Weiss, and it is to be regretted that a writer whose learning and research are so eminently conspicuous in many of the best lives in the work, should have permitted himself to be misled in much that he has said, by the errors of Champollion Figeac in the "Magasin encyclopédique." He certainly doubts the existence of Macaber as a writer, but inclines to M. Van Praet's Arabic *Magbarah*. He

states, that the English version of the Macaber Dance belongs to John Porey, *a poet who remains unknown even to his countrymen*, and is inserted in the "Monasticon Anglicanum." Now this *unknown poet*, who is likewise adopted by M. Peignot, is merely the person who contributed Hollar's plate in the "Monasticon," already mentioned in p. 45, and whose coat of arms is at the top of that plate, with the following inscription:—"Quo præsentis et posteris Mortis, ut vidimis, omni Ordini communis, sint magis memores, posuit IOHANNES POREY." M. Weiss has likewise inadvertently adopted the error that Holbein painted the old Dance of Macaber in the convent of the Augustines at Basle.

Two recently published Dances of Death have come to hand, too late to have been noticed in their proper places.

1. "Der Todtentanz. Ein Gedicht von Ludwig Bechstein, mit 48 Kupfern in treuen Conturen nach H. Holbein Leipzig bei Friedrich August Leo, 1831." 8vo. These prints are executed in a faithful and elegant outline, and accompanied with modern German verses.

2. "Hans Holbein's Todtentanz in 53 getreu nach den Holzschnitten lithographirten Blättern. Herausgegeben von J. Schlotthauer k. Professor. Mit erklärenden Texte. München, 1832. Auf Kosten des Herausgebers." 12mo. The prints are most accurately and elegantly lithographed in imitation of wood engraving. The descriptions are in German verse, and accompanied with some brief prefatory matter by Dr. H. F. Massmann, which is said to have been amplified in one of the German journals or reviews.

And lastly—The Reviewer of the first edition of the present dissertation, prefixed to Mr. Edwards's engravings or etchings by Wenceslaus Hollar, has displayed considerable ingenuity in his attempt to correct supposed errors, by a lavish substitution of many of his own, some of which are the following:—

That the Dance of Death is found in *carvings in wood in the choirs of churches*. Not a single instance can be produced.

That Hollar's etchings are *on wood*.

"Black letter" is *corrected* to "Black letters."

That the book would have been more *complete if Lydgate's stanzas* had been quoted, in common with others

in "*Piers Plowman*." Now all the stanzas of Lydgate are given, and not a single one is to be found in "*Piers Plowman*."

And this reviewer most *ingeniously and scientifically* denominates the skeleton figure of Death "the Gothic monster of Holbein!"

A short time after the completion of the present Dissertation, the author accidentally became possessed of a recently published German life of Holbein, in which not a single addition of importance to what has been gleaned from preceding writers can possibly be found. It contains a general, but extremely superficial account of the works of that artist, including the Dance of Death, which, as a matter of course, is ascribed to him. As the author, a Mr. Ulrich Hegner, who is said to be a *Swiss gentleman and amateur*, has not conducted himself with that urbanity and politeness which might have been looked for from such a *character*, and has thought proper, in adverting to the slight Essay by the present writer, prefixed, at the instance of the late Mr. Edwards, to his publication of Hollar's etchings of the Dance of Death, to speak of it with a degree of contempt, which, even with all its imperfections, others may think it may not have deserved; the above *gentleman* will have but little reason to complain should he meet with a somewhat uncourteous retort in the course of the following remarks on his compilation.

Had Mr. Hegner written with a becoming diffidence in his opinions, his work might have commanded and deserved respect, though greatly abounding in error and false conceit. He has undertaken a task for which he has shown himself wholly unqualified, and with much unseemly arrogance, and its usual concomitant, ignorance, has assumed to himself a monopoly of information on the subject which he discusses. His arguments, if worthy of the name, are, generally speaking, of a most weak and flimsy texture. In support of his dogmatical opinion that the original designs for the Lyons Dance of Death exclusively belong to Holbein he has not adduced a single fact. He has not

been in possession of a tenth part of the materials that were necessary for the proper investigation of his subject, nor does he appear to have even seen them. The very best judges of whatever relates to the history and art of engraving are quite satisfied that most of the persons who have written on them, with the exception of Mr. Ottley, and of the modest and urbane Monsieur Peignot, are liable to the charge of extreme inaccuracy and imperfection in their treatment of the Dance of Death; and the list of such writers may now be closed with the addition of Herr Hegner.

Some of his positions are now to be stated and examined.

He makes Holbein the author of a new Dance of Death in the Crozat or Gallitzin drawings in Indian ink which have been already described in the present dissertation, adding that he also *engraved* them, and suppressing any mention in this place of the monogram on one of the cuts which he *elsewhere admits not to belong to Holbein*. Soon afterwards, and with very good reason, he doubts the originality of the drawings, which he says M. de Mechel caused to be copied by Rudolph Schellenberg, a skilful artist, already mentioned as the author of a Dance of Death of his own invention; and proceeds to state, that from these copies De Mechel employed some inferior persons in his service to make engravings; advancing all this without the accompaniment of any proof whatever, and in direct contradiction to De Mechel's authority of having himself engraved them. An apparently bitter enemy to De Mechel, whose posthumous materials, now in the library at Basle, he nevertheless admits to have used for his work, he invidiously enlarges on the discrepancies between his engravings and the Lyons wood-cuts, both in size and manner; and then concludes that they were copied from the wood-cuts, the copyist allowing himself the privilege of making arbitrary variations, especially in the figure of the Eve in the second cut, which, he says, is of the family of Boucher, who, in spite of Hegner's opinion, is regarded by better judges as a clever painter. Whether the remarks on any deviations of De Mechel's prints from the Crozat drawings are just or otherwise can now be decided by comparison only, and

Hegner does not appear to have seen them, or at least does not tell us so. His criticisms on the merit of the engravings in De Mechel's work cannot be justified; for though they may occasionally be faulty, they are very neatly, and many will think beautifully, executed.

What Hegner has said respecting the alphabets of initial letters, is at once futile and inaccurate; but his comment on Hans Lutzenberger deserves the severest censure. Adverting to the inscription with the name of this fine artist on one of the sets of the initials, he terms him "an itinerant *bookseller*, who had bought the blocks and put his name on them;" and this after having himself referred to a print on which Lutzenberger is called FORMSCHNEIDER, *i. e.* woodcutter: making in this instance a clumsy and dishonest effort to get rid of an excellent engraver, who stands so recorded in opposition to his own untenable system.

The very important and indelible expressions in the dedication to the first known edition of the Lyons woodcuts, he very modestly terms "a play upon words," and endeavours to account for the death of the painter by supposing Holbein's absence in England would warrant the language of the dedication. This is indeed a most desperate argument. Frelon, the publisher and proprietor of the work, must have known better than to have permitted the dedication to accompany his edition had it been susceptible of so silly a construction.

He again adheres to the improbable notion that *Holbein engraved* the cuts to the Lyons book, and this in defiance of the mark or monogram **H**, which this painter never used; nor will a single print with Holbein's accredited name be found to bear the slightest resemblance to the style of the woodcuts. Even those in Cranmer's catechism, which approach the nearest to them, are in a different manner. His earlier engravings on wood, whether in design only, or as the engraver, resemble those by Urs Graaf, who, as well as Holbein, decorated the frontispieces or titles to many of the books printed at Basle. It is not improbable that Urs Graaf was at that time a pupil of Holbein.

Hegner next endeavours to annihilate the painting at Whitehall recorded in Nieuhoff's etchings and dedications, but still by arguments of an entirely negative kind. He lays much stress on this painting not being specifically mentioned by Sandrart or Van Mander, who were in England; but where does it appear that the latter, during his short stay in this country, had visited Whitehall? Even admitting that both these persons had seen that palace, it is most probable that the fresco painting of the Dance of Death, would, from length of time, dampness of the walls, and neglect, have been in a condition that would not warrant the exhibition of it, and it was, moreover, placed in a gallery which scarcely formed, at that time, a part of Whitehall, and which was, probably, not shown to visitors. It must not, however, be omitted to mention that Sandrart, in p. 239 of his *Acad. Pict.* states, though ambiguously, that "there was still remaining at Whitehall a work by Holbein that would constitute him the Apelles of his time," an expression which we may remember had been also applied to Holbein by his friend Borbonius in the complimentary lines on a Dance of Death.

Herr Hegner has thought fit to speak of Mr. T. Nieuhoff in terms of indecorous and unjust contempt, describing him as "an unknown and unimportant Dutch copper-plate engraver," and arraigning his evidence as being in manuscript only; as if manuscripts that have never been printed were of no authority. But where has Hegner discovered that Nieuhoff was a Dutch copper-plate engraver, by which is meant a professed artist; or even though he had been such, would that circumstance vitiate his testimony? In his dedication to Lord William Bentinck the expressions allusive to his ardent love of the arts, seem to constitute him an amateur attempter of etching; for what he has left us in that way is indeed of a very subordinate character, and unworthy of a professed artist. He appears to have been one of the Dutchmen who accompanied King William to England, and to have had apartments assigned to him at Whitehall. At the end of his dedication to Lord W. Bentinck, he calls himself an old servant of that person's father, and subscribes himself "your and your illustrious family's most obedient and humble servant."

The identification of William Benting must be left to the sagacity of others. He could not have been the Earl of Portland created in 1689, or he would have been addressed accordingly. He is, moreover, described as a youth born at Whitehall, and then residing there, and whose dwelling consisted of nearly the whole of the palace that remained after the fire.

Again,—We have before us a person living in the palace of Whitehall anterior to its destruction, testifying what he had himself seen, and addressing one who could not be imposed upon, as residing also in the palace. There seems to be no possible motive on the part of Nieuhoff for stating an untruth, and his most clear and unimpeachable testimony is opposed by Hegner's wild and weak conjectures, and chiefly by the negative argument that a few strangers who visited England in a hasty manner have not mentioned the painting in question at Whitehall, amidst those inaccurate and superficial accounts of England which, with little exception, have been given by foreign travellers. Among these Hegner has selected Patin and Sandrart. Before adducing the former, he would have done well to have looked at his very imperfect and erroneous account of Holbein's works, in his edition of the ΜΟΡΙΑΣ ΕΠΚΡΟΜΙΟΝ of Erasmus; and, with respect to the latter, the stamp of inaccuracy has been long affixed to most of the works he has published. He has mentioned, that being in company with Rubens in a Dutch passage-boat "the conversation fell upon Holbein's book of cuts, representing the Dance of Death; that Rubens gave them the highest encomiums, advising him, who was then a young man, to set the highest value upon them, informing him, at the same time, that he in his youth had copied them."¹ On this passage Mr. Warton has well remarked that if Rubens styled these prints Holbein's, in familiar conversation, it was but calling them by the name which the world had given them, and by which they were generally known; and that Sandrart has, in another place, confounded them with the Basle painting.²

To conclude,—Juvenal's "hoc volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas," may be regarded as Herr Hegner's

¹ Sandrart, Acad. Pict. p. 241. ² Obs. on Spenser, II. 117, 118, 119.

literary motto. He has advocated the vague traditions of unauthenticated Dances of Death by Holbein, and has made a most unjustifiable attempt to deprive that truly great artist of the only painting on the subject which really appears to belong to him. Yet, if by fair and candid argument, supported by the necessary proofs, the usual and long standing claim on the part of Holbein can be substantiated, no one will thereby be more highly gratified than the author of this dissertation.

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